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THE WASHINGTON POST
24 October 1978

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JFK Assassination and a Mafia Hit

There was high drama behind mobster Santos Trafficante's recent appearance before the House Assassinations Committee. He had been implicated in an incredible murder plot that had been aimed at Cuban President Fidel Castro that allegedly backfired against President Kennedy.

We reported the first half of the story, in all its fascinatingly sordid details, in January of 1971. We added the last half, carefully hedging, in September 1976. It took until this month to get Trafficante to respond on the witness stand. He denied playing any part in the Kennedy assassination. "No, sir," he said firmly.

The man who implicated him, mobster John Rosselli, was not available to testify against him. The unfortunate Rosselli was executed, gangland-style, on July 23, 1976.

But before he died, he told us that the Mafia killers, who had attempted to rub out Castro for the Central Intelligence Agency, had been captured and tortured. Then Castro, as the supreme irony, turned the killers against Kennedy, Rosselli suggested. He said they belonged to the Trafficante mob.

The flamboyant Rosselli, out of lifelong Mafia habit, was guarded in relating the story to us. He had come to trust us over the years, and we had dragged the story from him bit by bit. But now we have learned he confided the same story, in far more explicit detail, to his attorney Edward P. Morgan.

A former FBI official, Morgan went as far as attorney-client privilege would permit and tipped off the FBI on March 20, 1967. Because his client is dead, Morgan has now confirmed to us

that Rosselli was the confidential source who told him about the counterplot against Kennedy.

Rosselli was in a position to know what he was talking about. As the hit man recruited by the CIA to kill Castro, Rosselli developed informants close to Castro. These sources, never uncovered by Castro, kept Rosselli fully informed on how the assassination plot had boomeranged, Morgan said.

Police suspect Rosselli may have been murdered for talking too much about this bizarre plot. Twelve days before his death, he dined with Trafficante at the fashionable Landings restaurant in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. It is the custom in the Mafia to wine and dine a wayward member before he is executed.

Underworld informants told police that Rosselli was lured aboard a private boat by his executioners. It is also the Mafia practice to give murder contracts to friends whom the victim trusts.

According to the police, the 70-year-old Rosselli was strangled and his legs were sawed off so the body would fit in a metal drum. The murderers cut holes in the drum so it would fill with water and weighted it down with heavy chains. Then they heaved it into Miami's Biscayne Bay.

But apparently the gases from the body caused the drum to rise eerily from its saltwater grave. The drum, with its grisly contents, washed up on the shore.

Earlier Rosselli associates, knowing he had been in touch with us, called us to report his disappearance. They

feared foul play because of his contacts with us.

Two years later, Trafficante was summoned before the House Assassinations Committee and granted immunity to assure his testimony. He hunched down in the witness chair, a balding old man who did not appear to be the sinister Mafia chieftain whose name is feared throughout the underworld.

Chairman Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) read him our Sept. 7, 1976 column suggesting that the plot against Castro may have boomeranged against Kennedy. "Do you have any knowledge of that?" Stokes asked.

"No knowledge whatsoever," replied the mobster.

"Do you have any information concerning any retaliatory action by Mr. Castro?"

"No, sir."

"Do you have any knowledge concerning how this information could have been given to this columnist, Mr. Anderson?" the chairman pressed.

"No, sir," said Trafficante.

"Did you and Mr. Rosselli ever discuss any retaliatory action by Castro?"

"No, sir."

"Can you tell us," asked Stokes, "when was the last time you had seen Mr. Rosselli prior to his death?"

"I would say two, three weeks before his death."

"And where was that?"

"At Fort Lauderdale," said Santos Trafficante.

Footnote: As we have stressed in previous columns, Fidel Castro has vigorously denied any connection with the Kennedy assassination.

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